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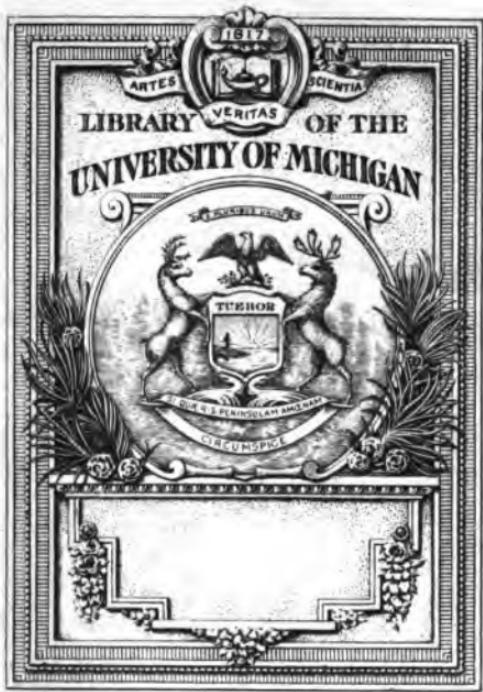
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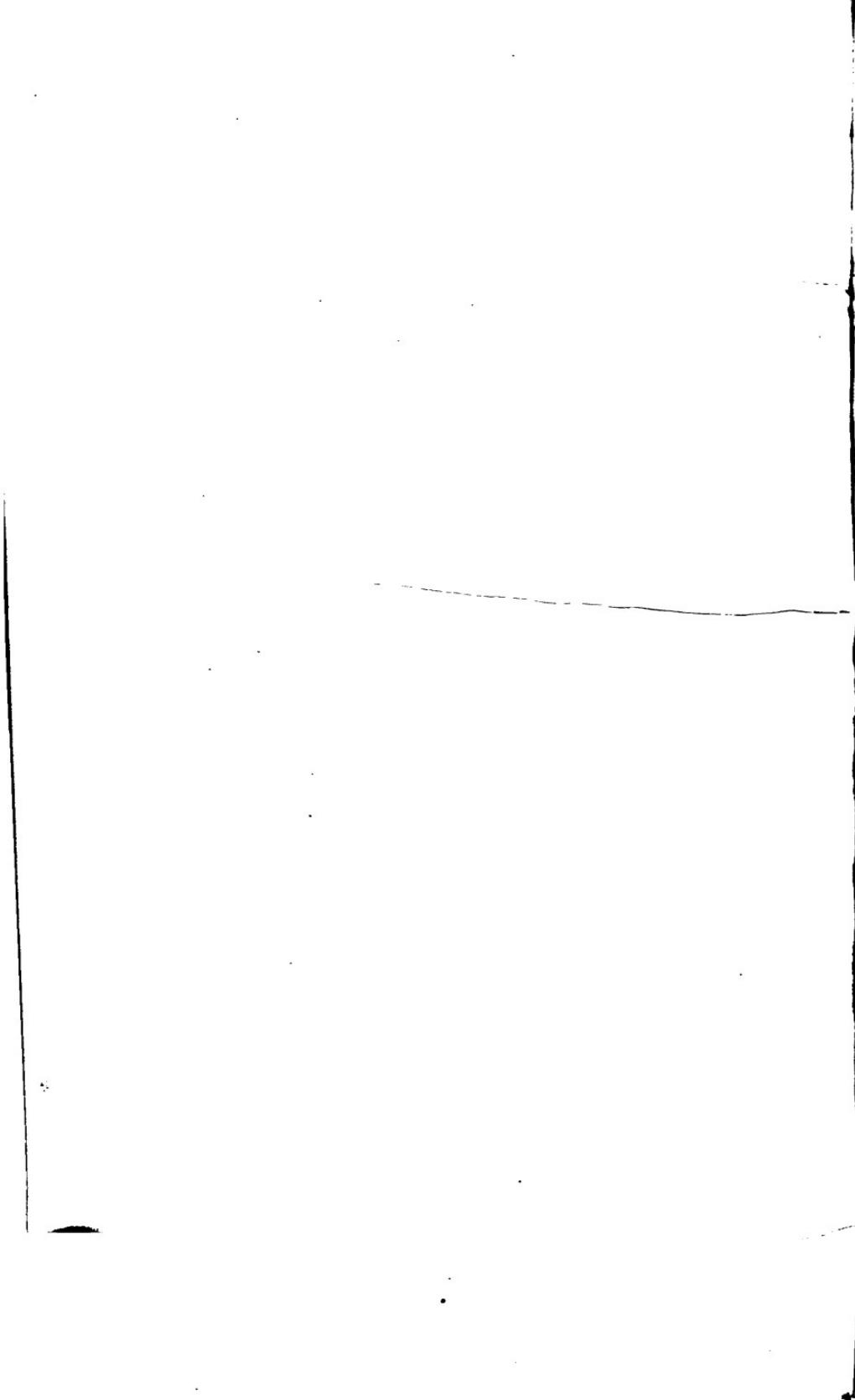
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MAKESHIFTS & REALITIES

By GERTRUDE ROBINS

Reynolds, Gertrude M.

"Mrs. L. B. Reynolds"



WERNER LAURIE
Clifford's Inn, LONDON

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MISS GERTRUDE ROBINS

ELWIN REAMER

MAKESHIFTS

A Lower Middle-Class Comedy

PRODUCED BY Miss HORNIMAN'S COMPANY
AT THE GAIETY THEATRE, MANCHESTER,
OCTOBER 5th, 1908.

CHARACTERS.

CAROLINE PARKER, *a Suburban young woman of about 30. Nervous mannerisms. Brown hair much frizzed. Dressed in a mauve silk tight-fitting blouse and dark-green skirt.*

DOLLY PARKER, *her younger sister, aged 28. Wearing a dark blue dress with cheap lace collar. Inclined to brusquerie and superficial sharpness.*

MR. THOMPSON, *the Parkers' lodger. Chemist's Assistant. Tall, thin, and rather shy.*

MR. ALBERT SMYTHE, *Stockjobber's clerk. Short sandy-haired. Moustache with waxed ends, shiny face. General blatant appearance.*

MAKESHIFTS

The Parkers' sitting-room. Large table R.C. Window L. with small table and ferns. Lace curtains, and canary in cage. Sideboard up R. with cruet-stand, biscuit-box, silver teapot, etc. Chairs round centre table. Fireplace back L.C. with overmantel, mirror, clock and ornaments. Easy chairs on either side of fireplace.

CAROLINE *sewing at back of table R. DOLLY reading novelette by fire L.*

CAROLINE. You didn't forget to order the soap from Brown's, did you, Dolly?

DOLLY. No—I mean yes—I did order it. [Pause.]

CAROLINE. [Turning lamp up.] Did you tell them we must have it by nine?

DOLLY. [Impatient.] Oh—yes. Don't worry.

CAROLINE. It's very well to say, "Don't worry," but you forget Mrs. Hunt's coming at eight, and there's an awful lot of washing this time. [Pause.] I shall have to get up at half-past six to get the boiler going properly. [Pause.] Mrs. Cox called this afternoon.

DOLLY. Oh, what did she want.

CAROLINE. Nothing. Only wasted my time. [Pause.] All her pipes burst last week—quite spoilt one of her drawing-room chairs, she says.

DOLLY. How exciting.

CAROLINE. You are grumpy to-night, Dolly.

DOLLY. Well, I'm tired.

CAROLINE. So am I, but I don't see that's any reason for being disagreeable. [Pause.] Oh, Dolly, isn't it a nuisance, we've got to have some coal in, and the last lot aren't paid for yet, and they're 28s. now.

DOLLY. Well, I suppose we shall have to use the fifteen shillings I'd saved towards a new jacket.

CAROLINE. I wish we needn't do that. You haven't had a new one for three years.

J.W.B.

DOLLY. What's it matter? There's no one to notice what I wear.

CAROLINE. Well, perhaps you might lend it, and then I'll give you some of Mr. Thompson's money at the end of the week, and when Ma gets her dividend she must make up the rest. [Pause.] Well, then, will you order half a ton to-morrow?

DOLLY. All right.

CAROLINE. Ma's been so difficult to-day, she quite tired me out.

DOLLY. Anything fresh?

CAROLINE. Oh, I don't know. She's got some new idea that she's being neglected, or that we don't confide in her or something.

DOLLY. Well, that's better than when she gets mopey and retrospective, and talks about her unhappy past.

CAROLINE. Still, Dolly, she has had a hard time of it.

DOLLY. Well, haven't we all, and isn't it going to be so world without end, amen?

CAROLINE. I don't know, I'm sure. [Pause.] Oh, Mrs. Cox says those new people two doors off are an awfully funny lot. [Dolly puts book in her lap and listens.] They haven't any carpets, and they don't touch butcher's meat, and their servant actually has her meals with the family. [Dolly laughs.] Mrs. Cox thinks they must be Socialists or Christian Scientists. There are some funny people in the world.

DOLLY. Yes, aren't there? Why, I was talking to that new teacher we've got to-day, and, my dear, if you please, she's a Suffragette.

CAROLINE. Oh!

DOLLY. Of course I didn't say what I thought of them, but she's evidently deadly serious. It beats me how people can make such idiots of themselves. A lot of good a vote would be to me.

CAROLINE. But I think there may be something in it, you know. [Pause.] By the bye, did you wash up the tea things, Dolly?

DOLLY. Oh, bother! No. I'll do it when I get Ma's supper. [Putting her book down and looking up.] Gracious, why, you've changed your blouse. [Meaningly.] I didn't know anyone was coming this evening.

CAROLINE. Don't be so—so—I suppose I can put something fresh on if I like, after spending the whole day in that stuffy, pokey kitchen, stewing over the hot fire, and washing up greasy saucepans ! I'd just like you to try it for a bit and see how you like it.

DOLLY. I shouldn't like it at all, my dear. But then, I don't suppose you'd enjoy seven hours a day with a lot of horrid, noisy, fidgety children driving you mad. Why, you'd chuck it up the first row you got into with the Inspector.

CAROLINE. No. I expect it must be pretty sickening.

DOLLY. I wouldn't mind so much if there were any chance of things ever being different. But there's nothing to look forward to. It will always be the same. [Looking into fire.] I shall go on hammering D O G dog, C A T cat, and twice eleven are twenty-two, and twice twelve are twenty-four, into wooden-headed brats, and you'll be skivvy and housekeeper combined, and look after Ma, and wait on the lodger, and scrape and contrive to make both ends meet, till we're both too old for anything.

CAROLINE. Oh, don't be so depressing, Doll. It gets on my nerves. Besides, you never know, something nice might happen. Why, one of us might—might—might even get married !

DOLLY. You might, you mean. Fat lot of men wanting to marry a school-teacher ! Bless'm—they'd be afraid they'd get Euclid instead of eggs and bacon for breakfast, and that their buttons would never be sewn on. Oh, no. Men fight shy of girls like me. They think we're too clever ; they like nice, domesticated, homely girls. [Pause.] Besides, what chance do we have of ever getting to know fellows ? We've no father and no brothers,—How should I get to know men at a girl's school, or you sticking at home all day ? Why, we don't see a man to speak to from one week's end to another, except Mr. Thompson. And there's precious little romance about our lodger as far as I am concerned, even though he is a chemist's assistant.

CAROLINE. [Rising and putting on half-finished blouse which she has been making.] Oh, but he's a god-send to us. I don't know how we should have managed the rent without his thirteen shillings every week. [Crossing over towards fireplace.]

Besides, he's nice and quiet in the house, and very considerate, and he doesn't come home late or tipsy, like anyone else we might have got. [After trying to see back of blouse in glass.] Dolly, you might just tell me how this fits on the shoulder. [Dolly rises.] It's such a bother [looking into mirror over fire]. I'm afraid I've cut the neck out too far; I shall have to join a bit on, or put some lace over it.

DOLLY. [Standing and adjusting back of blouse.] No, it only wants taking up a little. Give me a pin. [Noise of door banging slightly heard off R.]

CAROLINE. [Starting.] Who's that? [Turning round to face Dolly.] It isn't eight, is it?

DOLLY. [Meaningly.] It's only Mr. Thompson—who else do you think it is? [Gentle tap at door.] There he is. Bother! [Loudly.] Come in!

CAROLINE. But I can't be seen like this! For goodness sake—

DOLLY. Thompson doesn't count. You needn't worry about him. [Loudly.] Come in!

THOMPSON. [Entering nervously R. Pauses just inside door.] Good evening, Miss Caroline; [pause] good evening, Miss Dolly. [Pause.] Busy as usual. [With a nervous smile.]

CAROLINE. [Very politely.] Oh, yes, Mr. Thompson, there is always something to do. Won't you sit down?

THOMPSON. [Hastily.] Oh, no, I'm afraid—I—I don't think I can, thank you. I'm—er—just going out again to the post, and—er—I've—er—promised to help Mr. Standing at the dispensary this evening, [Pause.] It's left off raining. I've just taken the liberty of bringing you ladies a few sweets. I hope you won't mind [edges bag of sweets on to table.]

CAROLINE. Oh, but Mr. Thompson, you shouldn't, really, you're too good. [Dolly sits again with her book.] But thank you very much, all the same. It is kind of you—isn't it, Dolly?

DOLLY. Yes, very. Thanks awfully. [Still reading.]

THOMPSON. [Nervously, gazing at Caroline.] Oh, not at all. I hope they're the sort you like. [Backing to door R.] Good night—good night. [Exits awkwardly R.]

DOLLY. Oh, that man is a trial—he does worry me.

CAROLINE. [Crossing to Dolly with sweets.] Well, I don't suppose you'll be above eating his sweets. There aren't so many men who take the trouble to give us things, anyhow. [Crossing back to table R.C., she sits down to work on blouse again.]

DOLLY. Give *you* things, you mean.

CAROLINE. Don't be so snappy for goodness sake. Look at that lovely pencil case Mr. Phillips gave you at Easter. You know you were awfully pleased about it.

DOLLY. Yes, and I've never heard the last about it from you and Ma since. There's a fat lot of excitement about a present from a Sunday School superintendent, isn't there?

CAROLINE. Oh, Dolly, you are always so discontented. We *do* know some nice people after all.

DOLLY. I like your idea of some nice people. A tame chemist's assistant who's our lodger, and a bald-headed Sunday School superintendent.

CAROLINE. But, Dolly, you haven't—you didn't—you're not reckoning—why, you've forgotten—there's Mr. Smythe.

DOLLY. Oh, yes, to be sure. Any way, *you're* not likely to forget him.

CAROLINE. Well, he's something, isn't he? And I expect we shall get to know some of his friends.

DOLLY. *We!* [Sniffs.]

CAROLINE. Oh, by the way, shall we have some coffee to-night if he—I mean Mr. Smythe—should happen to drop in? It would be rather nice.

DOLLY. Oh, then you *are* expecting someone?

CAROLINE. Oh, I'm not certain—something was said about it. [She leaves off sewing and turns round to her sister to talk to her]. But, Dolly. I do wish you wouldn't be so sharp with him if he does come; it isn't nice of you. You always go on reading when he's in the room: it's uncomfortable for him, and besides, it isn't polite.

DOLLY. Why shouldn't I? You know jolly well that he doesn't come to see me. [Pause.] I should have thought you two would like to have all the talking to yourselves. If that isn't being polite, what is?

CAROLINE. [Resuming her work.] Well, don't let's have a row about it. [Pause.] What's upset you to-day, Dolly?

DOLLY. Nothing. [*Throwing book on floor and gazing into fire.*] Only it's pretty sickening to be twenty-eight and feel that you're growing old and dull, with never any real fun or amusement like other girls—girls who are taken to theatres and dances, and wear pretty things, and get married and have nice houses, and gardens, and servants, and don't have to worry about every halfpenny they spend. It's all so hopeless, because neither of us can do anything different. With the skimpy, rotten education we got when we were kids, and no training to do anything in particular, we are expected to earn our own living—you as genteel general servant, and I as an assistant teacher of infants. And so here we are, hopeless and helpless, and we might as well be on a desert island.

CAROLINE. Ah, well, it's no good talking. [*Rising and puts her work on sideboard at back.*] I may as well go and put Ma's supper on the tray. [*About to exit R. Stops as she hears loud knock at front door. Turning to Dolly.*] That must be him—Mr. Smythe—I'm sure it is; he got such a firm knock, hasn't he? [*Knock.*] You go, Dolly, there's a dear. DOLLY. You go yourself. You know you are dying to. [*Violent rat-tat.*] Look sharp, or he'll have the place down. [*Knock.*]

[Caroline exits hurriedly R. Dolly rises and quickly arranges herself at glass. She sits down again, listens, but appears absorbed in her book as door opens. Caroline enters radiant, followed by Smythe.]

CAROLINE [R.C.] Dolly, here's Mr. Smythe. Isn't he naughty; he says he's been knocking for ten minutes. I'm sure you can't have, really!

DOLLY [L.] Well, he's had time to collect his thoughts then. [*Rising.*] How do you do? [*Extends hand awkwardly.*]

SMYTHE. Well, you girls, how are you going along? Thought you'd be by yourselves to-night as per usual [*standing back to fire*] and I might as well drop in and have a bit of a warm-up. [*Turning round and warming hands at fire.*] Crumbs, it's jolly cold out to-night. [*As he turns he sees chocolates on mantel shelf.*] What ho! Chocolates! [*Takes some and continues munching throughout scene.*]

CAROLINE. Oh, you poor, dear man. Come and sit in the easy chair. We were just going to have some coffee, weren't we, Dolly? I'll run and fetch it. You'd like a cup, wouldn't you, it will warm you up. [Kneels down and puts coals on fire.]

SMYTHE. Oh, I don't mind if I do. You are very cosy here, you girls. What I mean to say—you know how to look after yourselves all right. Trust you for that! What!

DOLLY. Well, there's no one else to if we don't. [Sitting R. by table.]

SMYTHE. Quite right. Always keep your optic on number one, that's what I say, eh? [Lighting a cigarette.] Now, what about that cup of coffee you was making such a song about!

CAROLINE. It won't be a minute. Dolly, mind you entertain Mr. Smythe whilst I'm gone.

SMYTHE. Oh, we'll look after ourselves all right. But mind don't you leave us alone too long. [Exit Caroline laughing.] [Watching her out.] Nice girl, your sister. A bit of all right, she is. Something kind of homely about her that I like. She'd make any chap that married her jolly comfortable. Now you know, you're different, I reckon.

DOLLY. Yes, it would be easier for me to make some people I know uncomfortable. [At table R.]

SMYTHE. Oh, I say, you know if you are so sharp you'll cut your face one of these days. And it don't always pay to be so clever. What I mean to say is, it isn't every chap likes it. Of course, I don't mind myself. I don't take any notice of what you say. No, what I meant was, you're not like your sister because you're more brainy—always got a book in your hand; but you are just a bit too smart, it would put some chaps quite off, I tell you.

DOLLY. That would worry me!

SMYTHE. There you go again! But you can't afford to be so stuck up about it as all that. What I mean to say is, you'll want some chap to marry you some day, won't you?—and that isn't the way to set about it.

DOLLY. I'm not so anxious.

SMYTHE. [Chuckling]. Oh, I say! Well, I think it's time that you ought to be. This independence, earning your own living, and all that, is all very

fine when you're young; but what I say is—what's it going to lead to—what about when you're old? That's where it comes in. It's then you want a man to look after you and buy you new hats and frocks and a nice little home with a servant to do the work, and nothing to do but enjoy yourself, ain't it?

DOLLY. [A little softer.] Yes, I know, but there's nobody likely to want to marry me, and besides—

SMYTHE. Oh, but it isn't so bad as all that, you take my word. You're good looking, you know, and you've a decent figure, and all that, and so long as you don't bite a chap's head off every time he opens his mouth, you needn't be left on the shelf. Not but what you ought to be keeping your eyes open, and watching out for a probable starter. Of course, it's none of my business, and I don't want to interfere, but I take a sort of interest in you girls. Especially you, you know. You're clever, and can understand a fellow's ideas, and that's what a man likes.

DOLLY. [Slowly.] But if you think so much of marriage why don't you—er—practise what you—er—

SMYTHE. [With elephantine coyness] Oh, well, we'll have to see how things turn out. Anyway, I've got a rise this year, and going along very nicely now, and my wife what may be won't have to go out to work, you can bet on that. You can furnish so cheap, too, nowadays. What I mean to say is, a couple of quid down, and you get the whole outfit, piano and all. What do you think of that, eh?

[Winking.] You wouldn't think twice about it if a chap like me come along with a proposition like that would you?

DOLLY. [Breathlessly.] It all depends.

SMYTHE. Quite so! Quite so! But when there's a chance of a windfall of that sort, it's as well to be prepared, ain't it? [Crosses to Dolly L. Mouth full of chocolates, hands in pocket, and portentious air.] Now, Dolly, no larks, strictly on the Q.T., and between ourselves—I come in this evening to ask you—to tell you—something very particular—

DOLLY. Well, Mr. Smythe?

SMYTHE. Oh, well, there now. Never mind—another time p'raps. Your sister will be coming in in a minute. [Turning to go up stage.]

DOLLY. [Rises. *Excitedly.*] Oh, no she won't.
What is it.

SMYTHE. [Awkwardly.] Well—I mean to say—you see, it's like this. I don't want you to think I'm making too bold, but what I want to ask you is this—

DOLLY. Yes?

SMYTHE Is there anything up between you and old Phillips—you know, the bald-headed chap what sometimes takes your Sunday School class? Not my business, of course, but—

DOLLY. Good gracious—the idea! I should think not, indeed. [Disappointedly.] Had that got anything to do with what you were going to ask me?

SMYTHE. Oh, well, I say, I don't want you to be offended. He's not a bad chap, and I take a sort of interest in you. I know a bit about Phillips, and he's not half a bad catch, and not nearly so old as he looks. And his people are all right, too, and there's a tidy bit of money in that family. [Self-consciously.] I know his sister rather well, you know. Well, what I meant to say was—I was thinking—Any way you might—

DOLLY. Yes?

[Enter Caroline with coffee, sugar, milk, etc., on tray R. door.

SMYTHE. [Going np stage to fire.] Oh, here's the coffee, and it ought ter be all right, too!
[Dolly crosses L.C.]

CAROLINE. Wait till you've tried it. [She lifts up one lump of sugar for Smythe's approval.]

SMYTHE. Go on. [Caroline puts lump in cup and extends second piece in tongs.] Same again. [Caroline repeats business with third lump. [Ditto repeato. [Caroline holds up fourth lump.]

CAROLINE. My word, you have got a sweet tooth!

SMYTHE. Sweet tooth, sweet nature!

CAROLINE. [Giggling.] Oh, Mr. Smythe! [Handing him cup.] Voice heard calling: "Dolly! Dolly!"

DOLLY. Oh, bother, there's Ma! Didn't you take her supper up. Carrie? I suppose I must go!

SMYTHE. Remember me to the old lady. won't you?

DOLLY. Oh, there's not much chance of forgetting you.
[Exits, laughing.]

SMYTHE. Your Dolly is a fair knock out, she is. Mind

you, I like to see a girl with a bit of go in her. But she's a little bit too ikey, she is. Now, you're more up to my ideas. I mean to say you're more the sort of girl to make a man comfortable. You see, a chap don't want a girl to jump down his throat every time he opens his mouth. You're much more what I call affectionate and womanly.

CAROLINE. [Coyly.] Oh, what nonsense! [Crosses to fire L. and sits down.]

SMYTHE. You know what it is. I can't make it out why you didn't get married. Nice homely girl like you.

CAROLINE. Well, nobody's ever asked me. I've only known such a few men.

SMYTHE. Well, you do surprise me. Now, with me, you know, it's just the opposite. It's taken me all my time to keep the girls off. [With smug satisfaction—and sweeping gesture.] Why, they are all over me. If I was to tell you the names of some of the girls what have thrown themselves at me and fairly asked me to marry them—well, it would stagger humanity, it would. You take my word.

CAROLINE. Oh, Mr. Smythe, you don't say so. How could they?

SMYTHE. [Patronizingly.] Oh, well, of course, you see, they are a different sort to what you are. I don't mind a bit of cuddlin' and squeezin' and all that, just to pass the time. That's all right in its way, but as for marrying that sort—no thanks, says your humble servant. I'm not taking any. But you, now, you're all right, or I shouldn't be in quite so often. A fellow that goes about among Society at all has got to look after himself these days.

CAROLINE. But we're always very pleased to see you, Mr. Smythe.

SMYTHE. Oh, that's all right. I like to cheer you up a bit. Must be doosid slow for you girls, here by yourselves. And as a matter of fact I dropped in to-night on purpose to see you about something very special.

CAROLINE. [Nervously.] Not really?

SMYTHE. Well, now, it's like this, you see. I'm pretty tired of knockin' about alone, livin' in digs by myself, and no one to look after me or to talk to, and I've been turning it over in my mind—

CAROLINE. Yes?

SMYTHE. You see, there's so many ways in which a fellow gets done in. Now, there's the washing. I reckon they charge me a shilling or one-and-sixpence a week more than they would if there was someone to look after things for me,—and the scuttles of coals they say I use! All at sixpence a time, too! And they charge a shocking lot for mending which I shouldn't have to pay for at all. Mind you, they always say that it doesn't cost a bit more for two to live than one. Now, what's your idea?

CAROLINE. [Eagerly.] Oh, I'm sure it can't cost more—with a little management. It's wicked for them to charge you for mending. I've often thought how lonely it must be for you.

SMYTHE. Lonely! Why, that isn't the word. It's rotten, all by myself, it's enough to give anyone the pip; and you know I'm fond of society, too.

CAROLINE. And just fancy if you were ill, with no one to look after you properly!

SMYTHE. Yes, that's what I've been thinking lately, when I'm a bit off colour. Now, what sort of a husband do you reckon I'd make?

CAROLINE. I'm sure I don't know—you see—well, I've never thought about it before, but do you really mean—

[*Gentle knock at door Enter Thompson.*]

THOMPSON. [Nervously.] Oh, I beg your pardon, Miss Caroline. I didn't know you were engaged. I thought you were alone. I've only come to bring you this evening's paper. I thought you might like to see it.

SMYTHE. Oh, I say, that's just what I wanted to see. [Crossing over to him. Takes paper and opens it. Takes out chocolate from bag in pocket, and throws it across table towards Thompson.] Have a chocolate, old boy?

THOMPSON. [Stiffly.] No thanks. I don't care for sweets.

SMYTHE. All the more for us, then. [Taking chocolate back and eating it.]

CAROLINE. [To Thompson.] Won't you sit down?

SMYTHE. Yes, go on. make yourself at home, old chap. [Crossing back to fire.]

THOMPSON. No thanks very much, I must be going, really. I didn't mean to intrude. It's come on to rain again. Good night.

SMYTHE. Well, so long, old boy. [*Exit Thompson.*
Smythe whistles meaningly.] So that's it, is it?

CAROLINE. What is, Mr. Smythe; I don't know what you mean.

SMYTHE. Oh, yes you do. You know right enough. You quiet girls, you're a hot lot, you are. [*Pointing at her.*] I saw him making googoo eyes at you. When's the weddin'?

CAROLINE. Oh, don't be such a tease! Mr. Thompson indeed, the idea!

SMYTHE. He does look a bit of a mug. But you never know with some of these dark horses. Still, a bird in the 'and is worth two in the bush. And, after all, you never knows your luck, do you—eh, what?

CAROLINE. How absurd you are!

SMYTHE. Oh, but I'm not jokin'. I'm not, really. Now, I'm not a man to talk about myself. You know that, don't you?

CAROLINE. Yes. Well?

SMYTHE. But this evening—I tell you straight—I've got a bit of news that will make you sit up.

CAROLINE. Well, tell me.

SMYTHE. Well, I've been talkin' to you about gettin' married. have'n't I?

CAROLINE. [Nervously.] Yes, yes.

SMYTHE. And you think it's a sound proposition, now don't you?

CAROLINE. [Rather faintly.] Ye-es, Mr. Smythe.

SMYTHE. Well, I think so too, so we're agreed, ain't we?

CAROLINE. Yes, certainly, but—

SMYTHE. Well, what I wanted to say was—I mean ter say—you see it's like this—I— [*Enter Dolly, noisily.*]

DOLLY. I've settled Ma all right for the night. She's got her supper, and she's had her medicine. So I hope I can have a little peace now. [*Sitting down at L. of table.*] If I shan't be in the way.

SMYTHE. There she goes again! Well, you are a girl! Bring your chair up to the fire. Make yourself at home, there's plenty of room. [*She comes up to fire and sits in armchair.*] That's right. Well, now, look here. I might as well tell the pair of you what I came to see you for this evening.

DOLLY and CAROLINE. [Together.] Oh, but really!

SMYTHE. Well, I say you are a funny lot. Why not

now? It's what I came for. [*Caroline and Dolly look apprehensive.*] Well, then, without any more beatin' about the bush, it's like this. Yours truly—Albert J. Smythe, Esq.—is going—is going to be married. There!

BOTH. Oh!

SMYTHE. Is goin' to be married! Well, what d'you think of that now—eh? [Pause.] How's that for a bit of news? I bet you won't guess who it is, but she's a winner, she is. You take my word. [Pause] Well, a'int either of you going to wish me luck?

CAROLINE. But—but—

DOLLY. But who?

SMYTHE. Well, I don't mind telling you—but not a word—not a word to a soul, now! We want to keep it quiet for a bit. The happy bride to be is Miss Rose Phillips, Sidney Villa, Saint George's Square—the sister of the gent what you and I was mentioning a little time back. [*Expressive wink at Dolly.* Pause.] Ah—I thought that would surprise you.

DOLLY. [Slowly.] Well, I'm sure I congratulate you, Mr. Smythe.

CAROLINE. [Slowly.] I hope you'll be very, very happy, Mr. Smythe.

SMYTHE. Oh, I'll watch that. Rose isn't half a bad sort. Not fussy or clever, but understands a fellow, and what's more, she's got a useful little bit in the bank, too, that her grandmother left her, and that's always handy. Oh, yes, what I mean to say is, I think I'm doing the right thing for myself this time. Every man ought to get married, and we've all got to come to it sooner or later. I'll bring my girl round to see you one Saturday afternoon, but don't you tell her too much about me. She's a bit jealous, you know. I'm rather a popular chap with the ladies, somehow. And, I'll have to be careful, what with a Sunday School superintendent for a brother-in-law. [Looks at watch.] Lord love a duck. Half-past ten, and I promised to fetch Rose from her Choral Society. Of course, she'll have to give up all that sort of gadding about once she's married and settled down; but still, as she says, it's a pity to waste the subscription now. Well, so long, girls. [Shakes hands with the two girls.] Thought I'd

cheer you up a bit to-night. I'll pop in again when —when I haven't much to do. Ta-ta. [Caroline rises.] You needn't see me out. I don't, mind shutting the door myself.

[Exit Smythe. Caroline stands by fire, gazing into it. Dolly picks up her book. They remain silent. Front door bangs. Dolly puts down book and crosses to sideboard, where she gets another smaller one and note-book, with which she sits at Table C facing the audience. Head resting on her hands, elbows on table. Caroline wipes away a tear.]

CAROLINE. What are you doing, Dolly?

DOLLY. I'm preparing for Sunday School class. I've got to take it to-morrow, and I want the lesson to be specially good—

CAROLINE. Why specially good?

DOLLY. Oh, because—because—well, for one thing, Mr. Phillips will be back from his holidays, and—er—

CAROLINE. Oh, I see. [Caroline crosses to Dolly, puts hands on her shoulders and kisses her.] Good night, dear.

DOLLY. [Looking up, surprised.] Why—you've been crying.

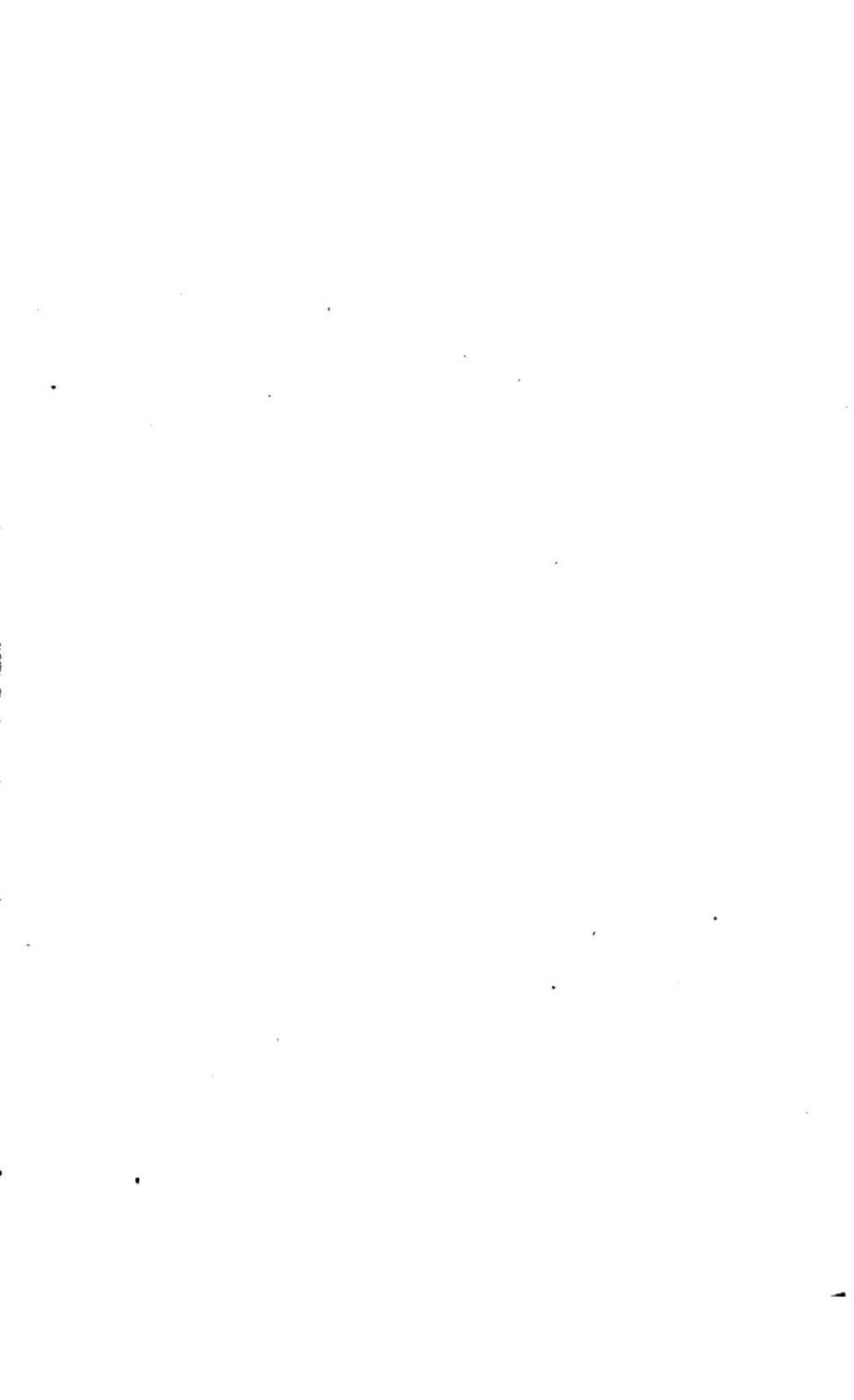
CAROLINE. Oh, I've got a bit of a headache, I think. [Crosses L C.]

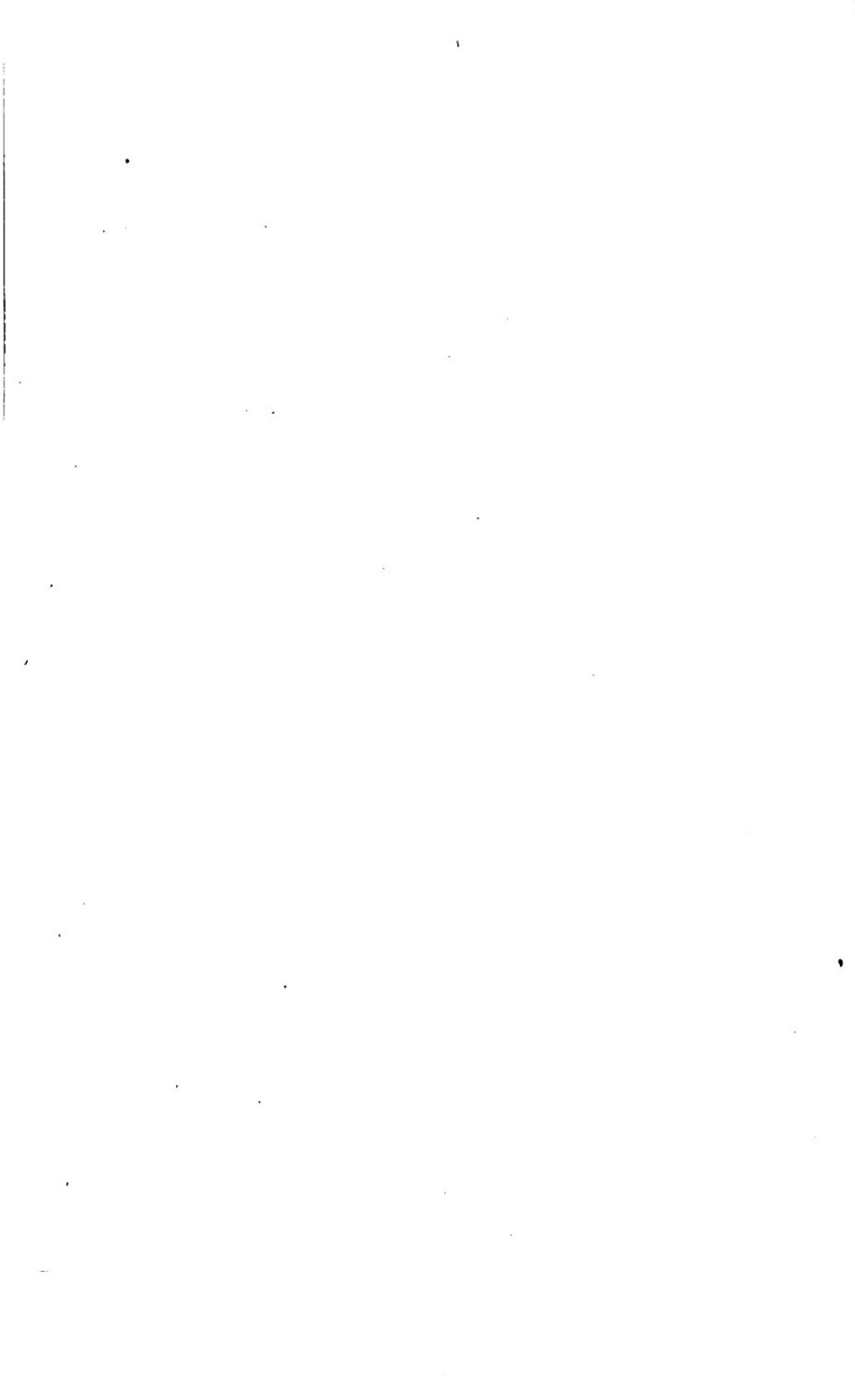
DOLLY. But what's the matter?

CAROLINE. Only something I was thinking of. It's nothing. [Brushes tears away, looks at clock.] I've got an idea. There's just time [she crosses the room towards door, speaking as she goes] before the shops shut to run round and get a haddock for Mr. Thompson's breakfast—he's very fond of fish. I remember he said he liked haddock better than anything.

[Exit hurriedly. Dolly remains watching Caroline go off. Turns to book again. Looks up. Suddenly closes book, pushes it from her, and collapses, her head buried on her arms.]

SLOW CURTAIN.





REALITIES

*A Middle-Class Comedy
in one Act.*

*To be played as a Sequel to
"Makeshifts" or independently.*

DRAM. PERS.

MRS. HENRY THOMPSON (*nee Caroline Parker.*) Aged 32. *Tired-looking and dowdy.*

MRS. ALBERT SMYTHE (*nee Rose Phillips.*) Aged 28. *Showily dressed Self-satisfied.*

HENRY THOMPSON. Assistant at wholesale druggist's
Aged 35. *Awkward, simple and shy.*

ALBERT SMYTHE. Aged 33. Stockjobber's Clerk.
Florid, stoutish, self-assertive with Cockney mannerisms.

SCENE. *The Thompson's parlour in the Suburbs.*
Same set as for "Makeshifts."

TIME. *The present.*

REALITIES

Ordinary suburban parlour. Mrs. Thompson sitting at table with work basket at her elbow. Mrs. Smythe in easy chair by fire.

MRS. SMYTHE. Well I'm sure, I'm very glad I found you at home. I don't know what I should have done if you'd been out. I hadn't got my umbrella and just as I was going past your door, it came down in torrents. It's lucky you were in.

MRS. THOMPSON. Oh I'm pretty sure to be in of an afternoon.

MRS. SMYTHE. And how's Mr. Thompson getting on? I haven't seen him for a long time.

MRS. THOMPSON. Nicely thank you. How is—er—how is Mr. Smythe?

MRS. SMYTHE. Oh he went to see the doctor last week, he was a bit worried about himself, but it was only the indigestion. Those city lunches—you know what Stock Exchange gentlemen are. He has to take care of himself. They think the world of him at the office, he says.

MRS. THOMPSON. Yes, he's so clever, isn't he?

MRS. SMYTHE. Its funny, he was talking of you last night. I didn't think I should be seeing you so soon.

MRS. THOMPSON. (*Eagerly.*) Really? Was he?

MRS. SMYTHE. Yes. He was saying what a quiet sort of girl you were when he knew you before you were married. And I said you weren't much different now. Why don't you get out more—go about and see people? I don't believe in sticking indoors all day long. You don't get any thanks for it either.

MRS. THOMPSON. But there's so much to do. I can't leave the house.

MRS. SMYTHE. Well, I don't know how you put up with it, it wouldn't suit me. If I don't get out of an afternoon and see people, I get all anyhow—you know what I mean—gets on my nerves. Its so dull at home, nothing to do.

MRS. THOMPSON. Well you've got a servant you see, and that makes all the difference. When one has to do all the housework.

MRS. SMYTHE. You don't mean to say you do it all yourself?

MRS. THOMPSON. Yes I do. Every bit.

MRS. SMYTHE. It would kill me. Why don't you keep a girl?

MRS. THOMPSON. We can't afford it.

MRS. SMYTHE. But a girl doesn't cost very much really. Why when we first married, I only gave mine 2s. a week—and her food, of course. Still bread's cheap enough. She wasn't any good at the work, I always had to be going on at her, but at any rate, it was someone to open the door. I think its dreadful, to have to go the door yourself. I've never done that.

MRS. THOMPSON. But we never have any real visitors, except the Vicar, and he's so nice, I don't mind him.

MRS. SMYTHE. But you must have more callers than that. What about your At Home days?

MRS. THOMPSON. Oh I don't have one.

MRS. SMYTHE. Don't have an At Home day? Gracious! Why, I don't know anybody who hasn't one! You ought to, really.

MRS. THOMPSON. It must be such an expense.

MRS. SMYTHE. Oh no, it doesn't cost anything to speak of. Have it two days running, so that you can make the same cakes do, with a few new ones on top of course. You can't expect to know people if you don't have an At Home day. That's what I say.

MRS. THOMPSON. Then you're different. You've so many friends.

MRS. SMYTHE. I was just like you when I started, didn't know a soul. But I went about everywhere, Bazaars, Tennis Teas, Whist Drives, At Homes, and everything, and now it's about as much as I can do to keep in with them at all. Do you know I've got *forty-six* people on my list!

MRS. THOMPSON. I can't think how you do it.

MRS. SMYTHE. Oh well, its Albert. He's such a one for getting into Society! Besides he says, what's the use, of having clothes, if you don't wear them!

How do you like this ? I noticed you looking at it. Brown and Kendal's I got it at. Cheap too. Five, seventeen and eleven it was, and I got it at Five four. Lined all through with silk it is. I never pay what they ask, you know. Like it ?

MRS. THOMPSON. Oh I think it's beautiful. So cheerful, too.

MRS. SMYTHE. You ought to get something like it. Just suit you. Give you a bit more colour. You're so pale, aren't you ?

MRS. THOMPSON. I could never spend five pounds on one frock.

MRS. SMYTHE. You make Mr. Thompson give you one. Of course I buy my own clothes myself you see. I've got my own money. Not but what I don't make Albert buy me something now and again, you know. On principal. He says I pay for dressing. Of course, some women do. I thought this would do so nicely for going away. We're going to Folkestone this year. I like Folkestone. Its so refined.

MRS. THOMPSON. Yes, I've always heard its a nice place.

MRS. SMYTHE. Where are you going for your holidays ?

MRS. THOMPSON. I don't think we shall go away this year.

MRS. SMYTHE. Oh, but really you ought to. Why, you didn't go anywhere last year, did you ?

MRS. THOMPSON. No, I couldn't very well. It was just before baby came. But we had a nice time the year before last at Clacton when we went for our honeymoon. Its a very pleasant place I think.

MRS. SMYTHE. Rather trippery, isn't it ?

MRS. THOMPSON. Perhaps it is. But I liked to see them all enjoying themselves so.

MRS. SMYTHE. It wouldn't suit Mr. Smythe I'm afraid. He's so particular where he goes. Nothing but the very best for him. Eastbourne or Scarborough or some really select watering place.

MRS. THOMPSON. Oh yes, of course.

MRS. SMYTHE. I say, has it stopped raining do you think ?

MRS. THOMPSON. I'll see. (*Looks out of window.*) Yes, its cleared up now.

REALITIES.

MRS. SMYTHE. I must be getting along then, or I shall have Mr. S. in before I get back. He hates it, if I'm not there. Besides, I always like to put on my *negligee* for dinner. Now when are you coming round to see me? I've got such a lot of things to show you. We've got a new sideboard in the dining room. Very expensive it was, but so handsome. Suppose you pop in to-morrow.

MRS. THOMPSON. I'd like to, but I'm afraid I can't. You see, I don't leave Baby, not alone.

MRS. SMYTHE. Why! Can't leave the house?

MRS. THOMPSON. No, I never go out unless Henry's at home.

MRS. SMYTHE. I always think a baby must be an awful nuisance. And such a tie.

MRS. THOMPSON. But he's a great dear.

MRS. SMYTHE. Well, any way, I'm glad I haven't any. I couldn't be bothered with them. Mr. Smythe doesn't want any either. He says they make a woman look so old too, having kids.

MRS. THOMPSON. Oh!

MRS. SMYTHE. And the expense of them! Why, you can be having no end of a good time with the money they must cost. I expect you find that, don't you?

MRS. THOMPSON. We have to cut and contrive to make both ends meet of course. But he's a very happy contented little fellow. We're just going to get him a mail cart.

MRS. SMYTHE. But is it worth all the trouble and expense? That's what I always look at. Of course, once its there, theres nothing to be done about it, you've just got to make the best of a bad job.

MRS. THOMPSON. Well, there are two ways of looking at it.

MRS. SMYTHE. Maybe, but Mr. S., he says you know, he'd rather have a kid's room, than its company, any day.

MRS. THOMPSON. But *you'd* like to have one, would'n't you?

MRS. SMYTHE. No thank you, its not much in my line. I'm afraid I'm too modern, you know.

CAROLINE. Oh!

MRS. SMYTHE. Well now, I really must be going. Albert will be in such a stew. Oh dear, here's Mr.

Thompson ! Why, whatever can the time be ?
(Enter Thompson *nervously*.) How d'ye do, Mr. Thompson.? It is'n't six yet is it ?

THOMPSON. Yes it is. It struck as I was coming out of the station. It'll be about ten past now. (*looking at watch*.) That's it. Just ten past.

MRS. SMYTHE. Gracious ! I must fly. Whatever will he say ! Goodbye, Mrs. Thompson. Now mind you come round to see me. Goodbye. Goodbye. (*Exits accompanied by Caroline. Thompson fidgets around a little helplessly, eventually he settles down to take off his boots*.)

MRS. THOMPSON. (*Returning*.) I'm sorry I haven't got your tea ready. I had to stay and talk to Mrs. Smythe. But I won't be a minute.

THOMPSON. That's all right, Carrie dear. Don't you worry. Won't you give me a kiss first? (*Caroline kisses him*.) I'll just get my slippers and have a bit of a wash in the scullery. (*Goes out in his socks carrying boots*.)

MRS. THOMPSON. You might put the eggs on dear will you ? The water'll be boiling by now. (*She goes to cupboard and proceeds to lay table. In the middle of doing so, she stops and goes to look at herself in the glass. Then looks at her clothes and sighs*.)

THOMPSON. (*Returning*.) How's Baby ? I'll just go and have a look at him.

MRS. THOMPSON. Oh don't go now. Have your tea first. He's bound to wake if you go up.

THOMPSON. All right dear. Can I do anything ?

MRS. THOMPSON. No, I shan't be a second. The tray's all ready.

THOMPSON. That's nice. I am hungry. I didn't get much lunch to-day. I thought I'd wait and have a good tea. Its so expensive—everything you eat in town, and not nearly so nice as what you give me.

(*Mrs. Thompson exits and soon returns with tray. Thompson hurries to take it from her*.)

MRS. THOMPSON. Oh its all right Henry, don't you bother. (*Setting things on table*.) Come along now whilst your eggs are hot. (*She takes some sewing and sits by fire whilst Thompson has his Tea*.)

THOMPSON. It has been wet in town to-day. Have you had much rain here?

MRS. THOMPSON. Yes it rained the whole morning nearly. I couldn't take Baby out. But mother took him this afternoon.—

THOMPSON. Oh ay. I say, Carrie, th's is wonderful good jam. Is it what you made?

MRS. THOMPSON. Yes, its the last pot.

THOMPSON. Oh is it? I won't eat much of it then.
(Pause.) What have you been doing to-day Carrie?

MRS. THOMPSON. Oh just the usual. Scrubbing the kitchen and washing and ironing.

THOMPSON. Oh I know all those things of Baby's. You're such a one for keeping him fine.

MRS. THOMPSON. Oh yes, I like to see him as nice as other people's, but it does make a lot of work.
(Sighs.) I suppose its very wicked of me, but sometimes I almost wish we hadn't him.

THOMPSON. (Aghast.) Wish — we — hadn't — got — Baby! Our Baby! Oh Carrie!

MRS. THOMPSON. No, I don't mean that really. Not now he's here. What I mean is, if he'd never come at all—well, we couldnt miss him, then, could we? I mean, we couldnt miss what we hadn't got. You have to work so hard as it is.

THOMPSON. Oh I don't mind a bit of work.

MRS. THOMPSON. But there'd be a little more to spend on other things. We shouldnt always have to think and worry about every penny as we do.

THOMPSON. Ah then we shouldnt have Baby.

MRS. THOMPSON. Besides, a woman gets to look so old and ugly, when she has children.

THOMPSON. You couldnt look what you said, Carrie Never.

MRS. THOMPSON. Oh you're used to me, you wouldnt notice.

THOMPSON. Nor wouldnt anyone. Why you look younger and happier than you did two years ago, when we were married. Years younger. Why, Mr. Smythe was only saying so this evening.

MRS. THOMPSON. Oh whenever did you see him?
(Greatly interested.)

THOMPSON. In the train.

MRS. THOMPSON. Did you travel back with him?

THOMPSON. Yes. He came into my carriage on purpose to ask after you.

CAROLINE. Did he really?

THOMPSON. I asked him to look us up some evening, and he said he would.

MRS. THOMPSON. You asked him?

THOMPSON. (*Airily.*) Oh yes. (*Humbly.*) You'd like to see him. wouldn't you Carrie? You'd like him to come round. It would liven us up a bit.

MRS. THOMPSON. Oh of course, if he cares to. But I don't suppose he will. They've got a very fine house you know, and the furniture—inlaid Sheraton style throughout.

THOMPSON. Oh ay.

MRS. THOMPSON. Wasn't that a nice dress she'd got on? Didn't you like it?

THOMPSON. Suited *her* all right.

MRS. THOMPSON. It must be nice to have good clothes like that.

THOMPSON. You know what I always think, Carrie. Its wonderful, whatever you've got on you always look nice. You're not like some women, that have to be al! dressed up in frills and finery before they can show themselves. Why, even in that old dress—I always liked that one—why you look more the lady than Mrs. Smythe ever could.

MRS. THOMPSON. (*Laughing*) Oh you're such a one! You never notice what women wear, Henry. Now some people—they know at once.

THOMPSON. Sure you won't have any tea Carrie?

MRS. THOMPSON. No, I had mine with Ma at half past four.

THOMPSON. How is she to-day?

MRS. THOMPSON. Oh, she's been quite bright. Done all the mending for me.

THOMPSON. That's right. I'll take her the paper when I go up. Shall I take these things out?

MRS. THOMPSON. Will you? Just put them on the copper. (*Loud knock heard at the door.*) Gracious! who can that be?

THOMPSON. I'll see. (*Exits.*)

MRS. THOMPSON. It sounds like—it sounds like—Yes I believe it is. (*Hastily goes to glass and arranges her hair* Thompson returns with Smythe.)

SMYTHE. Good evening, Mrs. Henry Thompson. (*To Thompson.*) Didn't think I'd take you at your word so soon, did you? Neither did I.

THOMPSON. But we're very pleased.

SMYTHE. Well look here now. When I got home, me and the missus we had a little bit of a difference, and so I just took me 'ook, and here I am. I knew it 'ud make her mad if I come here.

MRS. THOMPSON. Oh Mr. Smythe.

SMYTHE. (*Standing back to Thompson who clears away tea things.*) Well and how've you been going along? I've been meaning to come and give you a look up for a long time, but somehow there's always something more important to be done, don't you know.

MRS. THOMPSON. Oh yes of course.

SMYTHE. But its a rummy thing. This evening I happened to get into the same compartment as your good man and as I 'adn't got me a paper, I 'ad to talk to him. And he said when was I coming along to see you, see?

MRS. THOMPSON. Yes he told me he'd asked you.

SMYTHE. Then when I got home, tired as a dog, after me hard day's work, not a soul in the place! Missus out, skivvy out, fire out. She'd been gadding about the whole afternoon an there you are—or rather where are you? When the cat's away don't you know? So there's no dinner ready for yours truly. I just waited till she come in and told her what I thought. I told her I was'nt going to stand nobally nonsense like that, and then she said a few things, and I replied in a few well-chosen words and then I come out and banged the door. She was in high strikes by that time, of course. Oh, these women, eh Thompson, what?

(*Thompson smiles feebly.*)

MRS. THOMPSON. (*Concerned.*) Oh but then Mr. Smyth, you can't have had anything to eat? Let me get you something. What would you like? There's a tin of salmon in the house, or Henry could easily pop out and get you a chop or something, and I'd cook it for you in no time on the gas.

SMYTHE. Lord luv'a duck! Bless you no. Don't you worry about me. I went straight round to the

"King's Head," and got a snack there, so I'm all-right. Don't believe in neglecting the inner man, ha. ha. What I say is, you can't afford to forget the commissariat department. Tell you what though, if you was to insist on it, I could force myself to have a drink. I've got a thirst on me, I wouldn't sell for a quid. Salt beef it was they gave me at the pub. I'm not so sure about the beef, but the salt was there allright.

MRS. THOMPSON. Well, what will you have? There's some stout, or I could make you a cup of tea if you like.

SMYTHE. No thanks, no tea for yours truly. A bottle of stout is more my mark.

THOMPSON. I'll go and get it Carrie.

SMYTHE. Yes, a bottle of stout, Just what I could do with. (*Lighting cigar.*) Ah, this is a bit of orlright, this is. What I call cosy. Glad I came here. I did think of going into the Mitchell's but I didn't know whether they'd be at home, and it's a dirty night too. (*Ruminating.*) My missus said she'd been round here this afternoon. How d'ye get on with her?

MRS. THOMPSON. Oh what a question.

SMYTHE. No larks, how do you?

MRS. THOMPSON. Its very kind of her to come and see me, I think.

SMYTHE. Do you know why she came.

MRS. THOMPSON. Why?

SMYTHE. 'Cos she's jealous—jealous of you, that's why.

MRS. THOMPSON. Jealous? Of me.

SMYTHE. Yes you see its like this. I'm always 'olding you up to her as what a wife ought to be. Tumble? I tell her she ought to take a lesson from you.

MRS. THOMPSON. From me?

SMYTHE. Yes I tell 'er 'ow careful and economical and tidy and affectionate and all that you are!

MRS. THOMPSON. Well I never!

SMYTHE. And then she wants to know how I know. Specially about the affectionateness, ha, ha.

MRS. THOMPSON. Oh, Mr. Smythe, how can you!

(*Thompson returns with two bottles of stout and a glass, which he puts on the table.*)

THOMPSON. There isn't only these two, is there Carrie?

MRS. THOMPSON. No, that's all.

SMYTHE. Oh well, that'll do A.I. for yours truly, ha! ha! (Getting up.) I say, you do go it, you know you people! Two whole bottles of stout in your cellar. Eh!

THOMPSON. (Depreciatingly.) Oh, we don't often have it, but the doctor said it would do Carrie good. You don't care for it much though, do you dear?

MRS. THOMPSON. No, I hate it.

SMYTHE. Bit of luck that is for me, ain't it? Well, here's a-catchin' of your eye! 'Appy days! (Winks at Mrs. Thompson, and empties his glass.) Ah, that's good. Lord I was dry.

MRS. THOMPSON. Won't you have a biscuit with it?

SMYTHE. No, thanks, not when I'm smoking. Here! I say Thompson, I'll give you a cigar. Can you smoke one? (Takes out case, and carefully selects one.) There. There you are.

THOMPSON. Thank you. Thank you very much.

SMYTHE. Got a light?

MRS. THOMPSON. On the mantelpiece, Henry.

(Thompson gets box of matches and tries with difficulty to light cigar. Smythe much amused. Nudges Mrs. Thompson. At last bursts out laughing. Thompson, confused, looks at him.)

SMYTHE. (roaring at the joke.) Oh I say look at 'im, look at 'im! Don't use up all the matches, old chap. It isn't bonfire night! Oh, there he goes again! Oh look at 'im, ha! ha!

THOMPSON. It won't light.

SMYTHE. Oh, he says it won't light! Ho, ho, he says it won't light! Try again, old cock. Stick to it! That's right. Are we down-hearted? No. Ha, ha, ha.

THOMPSON. But it's no good. It won't light.

MRS. THOMPSON. Have you bit the end off Henry?

SMYTHE. (To Mrs. Thompson facetiously.) 'As 'e bit the end off? 'As 'e bit the end off? Oh lor! 'Oh lor!' Ere leave off, leave off, you'll be the death of me, you will, stow it for Heaven's sake.

THOMPSON. I think there must be something the matter with it.

SMYTHE. Ho. Ho! Something the matter with it, Begad! Ho, ho, ho! (*Wiping his eyes.*) Just you have a good look at it.

THOMPSON. (*Smiling feebly.*) Its an imitation one!

SMYTHE. An imitation one! Oh lor, oh dear, oh dear, oh lor! I never came across such a bally expert as you are. I never worked that joke so well afore, although I've had lots of fun with it on the Exchange. Oh, was'nt he funny! Oh dear, Oh dear! I never laughed so much in all my life. Here, lets 'ave it back. I can't give it to you, you know. I'll want that again. Here I'll give you a real one now.

THOMPSON. No, thank yer. I don't think I want one. I'd as soon 'ave a fag. (*Produce packet of cigarettes and lights one.*)

SMYTHE. He daren't trust me again! He's an artful dog, he is. I'll have another drink after that. You funny devil, you. (*Playfully punching Thompson.* Smythe pours out another glass of stout which he puts on mantelpiece by his side and settles down in armchair. To Mrs Thompson) What's that you're doing? Another little stranger, eh?

MRS. THOMPSON. (*Embarrassed*) Its a pinafore for Baby.

SMYTHE. Oh, a pinafore for Baby, is it? What's it like? Take after its father?

THOMPSON. No. 'E's the very image of Carrie. Just her eyes. Would you like to see him? I'll bring him down.

SMYTHE. Well, if its all the same to you, I'd rather be excused. I'm not much of a family man, don't you know. Besides kids always slobber so. (*Silence*)

THOMPSON. (*Coughs to cover pause*) 'Ave you been up to see 'im Carrie since tea?

MRS. THOMPSON. (*Looking at clock*) No, but I ought to go now.

THOMPSON. No, don't you. I'll go. You stop and talk to Mr. Smythe. I can look after Baby alright. You sit still. I'll call you if he wants you.

MRS. THOMPSON. Thank you Henry.

(*Thompson exits.*)

SMYTHE. Rum go, ain't it. To think of you married and a baby and all, eh? How d'ye like it? Come up to your expectations?

MRS. THOMPSON. Henry is very good to me.

SMYTHE. So 'e ought to be. It ain't everyone who gets a wife like you, who looks after a husband like you do. Who'll skimp and plan and always manage to be cheerful and good tempered.

MRS. THOMPSON. I love looking after people and trying to make them comfortable.

SMYTHE. Yes, you always did. I'll say that for you. Now, my wife, she's quite different.

MRS. THOMPSON. Oh, but I'm sure she's very fond of you.

SMYTHE. My wife's fond of one person in this world and that's herself. See? That's the only person she's really fond of—Number one.

MRS. THOMPSON. But she thinks so much of you.

SMYTHE. And so she ought to. Here am I slaving away all day and what for? Just to keep her in luxury whilst she does absoballylute nothing. And then, when I come home she grumbles all the time. Scarcely troubles to keep a civil tongue in her head, except before company. Look at to-night too.

MRS. THOMPSON. Perhaps she thought the servant would be there to look after you.

SMYTHE. Well she'd no right to think. That isn't her business. Her business is to look after her husband and make him comfortable. Same as you do. I bet you're never gaddin' about when he comes home at night.

MRS. THOMPSON. Well, I could'n leave him to look after himself, could I.

SMYTHE. You could'n. Some people could, though. (*Drinking*) Ah well, I didn't come here to talk about my matrimonial grievances. I come to see you, and you 'aven't once said you were glad to see me.

MRS. THOMPSON. What nonsense! Why of course I'm glad. I think it was so kind of you to come.

SMYTHE. You know, you don't look a day older than that night when I came 'ere and told you I was goin' to be married. Do you remember? You and your sister, both of you. You was so funny about it. And then the next I hear is that you're both engaged. Must 'ave been catching. You know Carrie, it was a near thing. I turned it over in my mind, lots of times. Whether it was to be one of you or Rose. Of course, I didn't say anything. But its one of those things you never know what you ought to 'ave done till you've done the other thing.

MRS. THOMPSON. Whatever do you mean?

SMYTHE. What I mean is this, I oughth never to have married Rose. You're the girl I ought to have married. You'd have made me much more comfortable.

MRS. THOMPSON. Oh you mustn't talk like that, Mr. Smythe.

SMYTHE. Why not? What's the 'arm? Its true. You're the girl I ought to have married.

MRS. THOMPSON. I wish you wouldn't say such things.

SMYTHE. Ho, ho, wish I wouldn't say such things, do you? Now, don't you be silly. You know you were dying for me to ask you. You only married 'im as a makeshift. Think I didn't know? Lor, bless you, I knew all the time. You wouldn't have married a man like that if you could'a got me.

MRS. THOMPSON. (*Moving away.*) You mustn't say that.

SMYTHE. So would any woman with a ha'porth of sense. Look at the nice house we've got, new furniture and everything, and a servant, and a bit to spend on a Music Hall whenever you like. Any-way, its a cut above this I reckon.

MRS. THOMPSON. Henry gives me all he's got. He can't do more.

SMYTHE. Yes, but—look at him! 'E isn't 'alf awake, 'e's like a great girl, anyone could knock the stuffin' out of him left-handed.

MRS. THOMPSON. He's very good.

SMYTHE. So are lots of other dam fools.

MRS. THOMPSON. (*Getting up. Rather frightened.*) Its very wrong of you to say things like that. Besides it isn't true—(*Beginning to cry.*)

SMYTHE. Now then, now then, what are you howling about? You know jolly well you'd rather 'ave married me, don't pretend you wouldn't, see. You silly girl, you. (*Puttin his arm round her.*)

MRS. THOMPSON. Oh don't touch me! You've— you've been drinking.

SMYTHE. Well, what of it? Do you good too, to 'ave a drop of something. Warm the cockles of your heart. Here have a drop out of my glass! (*Holds glass to her mouth.*)

MRS. THOMPSON. Don't, don't do that. I don't like it I won't.

SMYTHE. Oh yes, but you will, though. Come now, none of your shinannikin'. Be matey now, 'ave a drink.

MRS. THOMPSON. No, I won't. I tell you I won't. (*Slight struggle, glass falls on floor.*)

SMYTHE. There! See what you done. That's your fault, that is. Henry'll have something to say about that! Muckin' up his nice new carpet, you little spitfire you.

MRS. THOMPSON. Well, you shouldn't have behaved like that. You're no gentleman.

SMYTHE. No gentleman, ain't I? No gentleman? All right then! I'll show you. (*Catches hold of her.*) Now you've got to pay for having said that! You've got to give me a kiss for that. (*They struggle.*)

MRS. THOMPSON. Oh don't! Get away! Leave off, I tell you. How dare you?

(*Door opens and Thompson enters. Realises situation.*)

MRS. THOMPSON. Henry! Henry!

(*Thompson rushes at Smythe. They wrestle, panting, Smythe is thrown down.*)

SMYTHE. 'Ere don't be a fool! What are you doing, you walking scarecrow, you. Damn you! You blasted idiot, mauling me about, what do you think you're up to?

THOMPSON. Lookin' after my wife. That's what I'm up to! I may be a walkin' scarecrow. I mayn't have your fine talk and ways. I'm not much company, I'm just a poor dull chap, but my wife's my wife, to be looked after and taken care of. She's so much above me, so much better

and cleverer and all that, I can only love her and be grateful to her for marrying a poor fellow like me, and what's more, I thank and praise God for her, every minute of my life. There's only one thing I *can* do for her. I can love her like a dog, and I can protect her like a dog. I'd give my life to-morrow for 'er. I know I'm not nearly good enough—she ought to have married somebody much better, with money to spend on her—somebody clever for her to be proud of. But she *did* marry me—I'm 'er husband, and so long as I am, I'm going to look after her, so 'elp me God!—Now you get out, and don't ever you show your face 'ere again.—Or—

SMYTHE. (*Slowly, with emphasis.*) Well, I'm jiggered! (*goes out trying to rearrange his clothes.*) (*Thompson stands watching him off. The outer door slams. Then he turns round and looks at Caroline, who is standing by mantelpiece, her head hidden in her hands. His late dominant manner falls from him, and he again looks meek and humble.*)

THOMPSON. Carrie!

MRS. THOMPSON. (*Muffled.*) Yes.

THOMPSON. Are you—are you angry with me Carrie?

MRS. THOMPSON. (*As before.*) Angry?

THOMPSON. I don't know what it was, but something seemed to get hold of me. I didn't mean to say what I did. I always knew you liked him, and I was so glad for you to see him and talk to him. He's more entertaining than what I am. You see, I always felt it was so good of you to marry me, and I know I oughtn't to have behaved like I did to anyone you cared about. I don't know 'ow I did it. Something seemed a-forcing me. I 'ope you'll forgive me, Carrie, dear.

MRS. THOMPSON. Oh Henry, Henry, how wonderful you are. I've never known you till now. Not really. (*She falls sobbing on his shoulder.*)

CURTAIN.

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